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# LAND USE DECISIONS

## SUMMARY

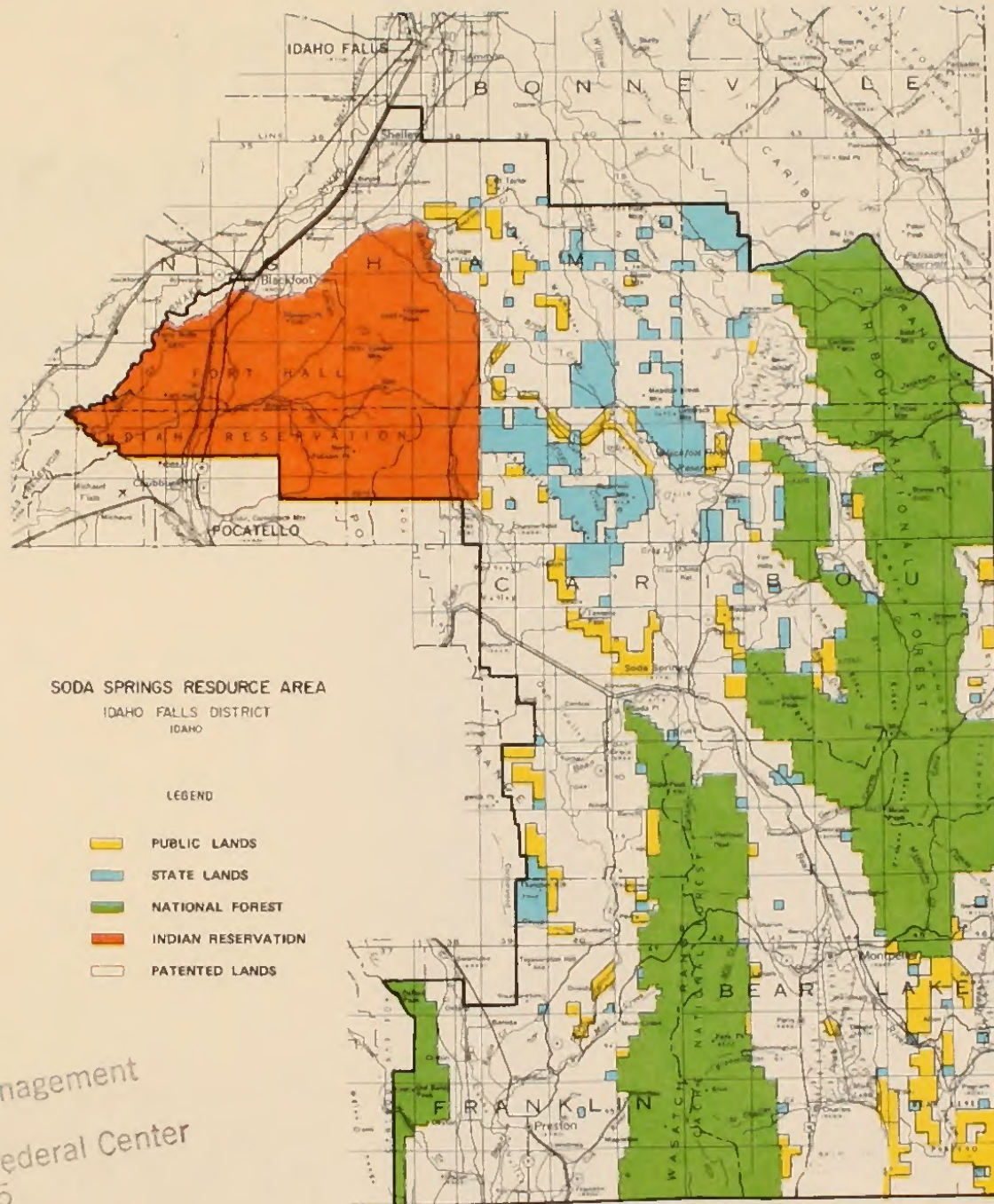
For Caribou and  
Bear Lake  
Planning Units

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR  
Bureau of Land Management  
Idaho Falls District,  
Soda Springs Resource Area







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As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities for water, fish, land, wildlife, mineral, park and recreational resources. Indian and Territorial Affairs are also concerns of America's "Department of Natural Resources."

The Department works to assure the wisest choice in managing all our resources so each will make its full contribution to a better United States — now and in the future.

The Bureau of Land Management, an agency in the Department of the Interior, administers programs for conservation and development of the public lands and resources. In Idaho, there are six Bureau of Land Management districts with offices in Idaho Falls, Boise, Burley, Salmon, Shoshone and Coeur d'Alene.

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*Public lands north of the Blackfoot River near the Narrows. The BLM is working with several counties to control the noxious weed in the foreground, musk thistle.*

# INTRODUCTION

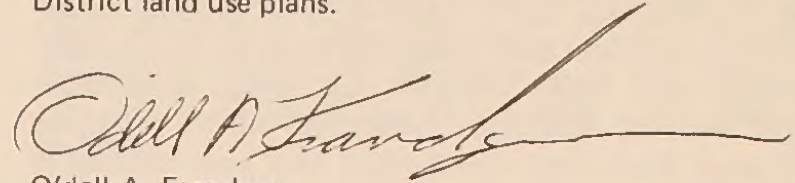
This brochure summarizes land use decisions for the Bear Lake—Caribou Management Framework Plan (MFP).

Because of the large number and complexity of some of the decisions, it is impossible to present all of them in this summary. We have, therefore, summarized only the significant decisions in each resource activity.

The Bear Lake—Caribou plan and all related documents are available at the Area Office in Soda Springs. You are invited to visit the office and review the MFP at your convenience. Marvin Bagley, Soda Springs Resource Area Manager, as well as my staff and I are available to discuss the decisions and help you review the document.

We expect to revise this MFP from time to time to meet the needs of the people and to cope with changing local and national conditions. Major revisions will be done with full public participation.

My staff and I wish to thank everyone who assisted in this effort, especially those attending our public meetings. We look forward to working with you in the future to form and update District land use plans.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "O'dell A. Frandsen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

O'dell A. Frandsen  
District Manager  
Idaho Falls District

January, 1981



# General Description

The Soda Springs Resource Area contains 145,336 acres of public land managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in Caribou, Bear Lake, Franklin, Bingham and Bonneville counties. The area also has 777,822 acres of National Forest, 237,944 acres of State land, 1,383,336 acres of private land, and 351,851 acres within the Fort Hall Indian Reservation. The BLM also has subsurface jurisdiction on an additional 480,803 acres where the mineral rights have been reserved to the Federal government. The following table breaks down these acreages down by the Caribou and Bear Lake planning units. The rest of this document will consider these two units as one.

Soda Springs, Preston and Montpelier are the major population centers in the area. The rest of the area is more rural with a less concentrated population.

Most public land consists of scattered tracts surrounded by National Forest, State or private land. This land pattern leads to many problems in management. Only 6 percent of the land surface is managed by the BLM. Public lands are now used for mining, livestock grazing, wildlife habitat, watershed, recreation and fisheries.

Phosphate mining and associated processing is the major source of area income and employment, followed by agriculture and livestock grazing.

The general vegetative types include sagebrush/grass, mountain meadow, aspen and Douglas-fir. Yearly precipitation ranges from less than 10 inches at Shelley to more than 35 inches on some of the higher mountains in the Caribou Range. Elevation varies from 4,500 feet at Preston to 9,957 feet at Meade Park east of Georgetown.

## Land Ownership in the Soda Springs Resource Area

	Public Land	State	Private	Withdrawn	USFS	Fort Hall	Federal Subsurface	Total
Caribou Planning Unit	76,132	207,035	794,338	32,120	423,300	351,851	403,200	1,884,775
Bear Lake Planning Unit	69,204	30,909	588,998	20,534	354,521	---	77,602	1,064,166
TOTALS	145,336	237,944	1,383,336	52,654	777,822	351,851	480,803	2,948,942

# Major Issues and Problems

Major issues and problems result from several things: present and potential land use conflicts, unavoidable environmental impacts of resource development, and social and economic impacts on local communities and life styles.

Issues and problems were identified through the BLM's planning process and public participation. The management decisions section describes these issues or problems for each resource.

# Significant Management Decisions

Resources and land uses are listed in order of decreasing importance. The ultimate basis for management decisions is the capability of the land itself. Accordingly, geology, climate, soils, topography, wildlife and vegetation along with public demand were major considerations in the Bear Lake—Caribou MFP decisions.

The following list of decisions is not complete. Persons wishing to see the complete official document may examine it at the BLM Soda Springs Area office.



# Minerals

The minerals program (which includes oil, gas and geothermal) covers these activities:

1. The disposal of minerals by lease, patent, permit, or sale;
2. Coordination of minerals development with other land uses;
3. The assurance of rehabilitation of mined land;
4. The evaluation and processing of mineral patent applications and appraisals.

Vast opportunities for mineral development and exploration are present in the area. Of the known commodities, phosphate and its associated minerals (notably vanadium, uranium and the rare earths) have the greatest potential.

Much of the planning units lies within the western phosphate field. The area north, south and east of Soda Springs contains about 80 percent of the western field reserves and about 35 percent of total U.S. reserves. These reserves lie on private and public lands that are reasonably accessible for mining by surface methods. The reserves should yield slightly over one billion tons with current mining technology and economics. About 14 percent of U.S. phosphate rock production is supplied by four major phosphate operations on National Forest, BLM and Indian Reservation lands in the area.

The phosphate industry is a major employer in the region.

Oil and gas potential is high because most of the area lies on the Overthrust Belt. Most available lands have been leased for oil and gas exploration or are under lease application. Recent oil and gas discoveries in Wyoming and Utah continue to stimulate interest in the planning units. Because geologic structure and strata are favorable, discovery of oil and gas in commercial quantities may only be a matter of time.

Increased exploration for geothermal energy can be expected. The presence of geothermal resources is suggested by a large gravity anomaly (see Glossary) in the China Hat area, young volcanics and scattered hot springs. Seventy geothermal lease applications have been filed covering about 115,000 acres and active exploration is beginning.

Major mineral decisions include the following:

PROTECT AND MAINTAIN THE KNOWN OUTCROPS OF PHOSPHATE. ENSURE THAT LANDS CONTAINING PHOSPHATE REMAIN AVAILABLE FOR EXPLORATION, LEASING AND DEVELOPMENT. OTHER RESOURCE VALUES WILL BE CONSIDERED IN ALL PHOSPHATE ACTIONS.

These phosphate deposits are extremely important to the local, State and national economies. However, other resource values such as wildlife, watershed and range will be considered while processing all phosphate-related work.

ENCOURAGE THE EXPLORATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF IDENTIFIED SUB-ECONOMIC RESOURCES: GOLD, CINDERS, SULPHUR, SALT, MANGANESE, CALCITE, COPPER, LEAD, ZINC AND BUILDING STONE. KEEP THESE AREAS OPEN TO EXPLORATION AND LOCATION OR LEASING.

These mineral resources are found throughout the units. lands must remain open, but other resource values must be considered.

ENCOURAGE EXPLORATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF UNDISCOVERED RESOURCES THAT MAY EXIST THROUGHOUT THE AREA. KEEP ALL LANDS OPEN TO MINING, LOCATION, LEASING, EXPLORATION AND PROSPECTING.



All lands within the units will remain open (particularly for oil, gas, and geothermal exploration and development) except for lands within the critical habitat boundaries of Grays Lake National Wildlife Refuge and Bear Lake National Wildlife Refuge. Wildlife and other resource values will be considered in these actions.

LOCATE, IF POSSIBLE, SOURCES OF SAND, GRAVEL OR VOLCANIC CINDERS SUITABLE FOR USE IN CONSTRUCTION OR FOR ROAD BASE. IF LOCATED, ESTABLISH COMMUNITY PITS AT THESE LOCATIONS.

Local communities and individuals have a need for sand, gravel and cinders from public lands close to their communities. Community pits will provide a service to local residents.



*Simplot's phosphate facilities at Conda, north of Soda Springs.*



# Wildlife

The area has a wide variety of wildlife. Large numbers of elk and deer winter on the public lands near Soda Springs and along the Wyoming border in the Stump Creek and Crow Creek drainages. Moose can be found on the scattered tracts of public land bordering the Caribou National Forest.

Other animals common to the area include sandhill cranes, geese, ducks, sage grouse and the endangered bald eagle. The BLM is working with the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the phosphate industry to study big game populations and habitat, and the impacts of phosphate mining on both.

Major decisions related to wildlife include the following:

CONTINUE TO SUPPORT THE SOUTHEASTERN IDAHO COOPERATIVE BIG GAME/PHOSPHATE STUDY.

Stipulations for oil, gas, and geothermal exploration and development will consider critical wildlife habitat areas and periods of use.

WORK WITH THE IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME TO DECIDE HOW MANY BIG GAME ANIMALS CAN BE SUPPORTED BY WINTER RANGES ON PUBLIC LANDS.

Determining the carrying capacity of the public lands for wintering big game animals is necessary to decide the optimum number of animals in a certain area. Goals for species management can then be set.



*Elk herd near Stump Creek.*



FILE FOR WATER RIGHTS TO ENSURE A CONTINUED SUPPLY FOR WILDLIFE USES. DEVELOP INSTREAM FLOW RECOMMENDATIONS IN CONJUNCTION WITH IDAHO FISH AND GAME FOR THOSE STREAMS ON PUBLIC LAND WHICH HAVE HIGH FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE VALUES.

IMPLEMENT A STREAMBANK PROTECTION AND RESTORATION PROGRAM FOR PUBLIC LANDS LOCATED ALONG THE LOWER BLACKFOOT RIVER, WOLVERINE CANYON, COTTONWOOD CREEK, FISH HAVEN CREEK AND ONEIDA NARROWS.

Livestock congregate along these stream bottoms. Special management considerations will be necessary to ensure streambank protection.

WILDLIFE VALUES WILL BE CONSIDERED IN ALL OIL, GAS AND GEOTHERMAL EXPLORATION AND DEVELOPMENT AND MINERAL LEASING.

WORK TO ACQUIRE PRIVATE LANDS THROUGH EXCHANGES IN THE SODA HILLS, NINETY PERCENT RIDGE AND STUMP CREEK AREAS BECAUSE OF HIGH WILDLIFE VALUES.

The prime importance of these areas is big game winter range.

## Lands

BLM surface management responsibilities are confined to 6 percent of the total land area in the units. Public land is widely scattered, composed of many small, difficult-to-manage parcels. Private, State and National Forest lands are much more predominant. Much of the public land lacks any access, or at best, legal access.

Much of the work in the lands program is related to agricultural trespass. These trespasses occur primarily on small, isolated tracts of public land surrounded by private land. Other lands work includes right-of-way grants for communication facilities, utility facilities and corridors, roads and trails, pipelines, tramroads and related mining facilities. Permits are issued primarily for agricultural use, minerals and mineral materials. Land disposal actions include unintentional trespass sales, public sales, exchanges, and recreation and public purpose patents. Land withdrawals now being reviewed include public water reserves, power-site revocations/restorations, stock driveways, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs withdrawal around Grays Lake and the Blackfoot Reservoir.

Major land decisions include the following:

PROVIDE LAND FOR THE EXPANSION OF THE GIRL SCOUT CAMP IN COTTONWOOD CANYON.

Part of the camp is now on public land; this action will allow additional public land to be transferred to the girl scouts under the Recreation and Public Purposes Act.

PROVIDE FOR THE RECONVEYANCE OF THE BEAR LAKE STATE PARKS LAND BACK TO THE BLM IF DEVELOPMENT HAS NOT STARTED BY FY 1982.





*Public land withdrawn by the Bureau of Indian Affairs on the north side of Grays Lake.*

These lands were patented in 1969 under provisions of the Recreation and Public Purposes Act to the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation. Projects in a 10-year plan of development were scheduled to be completed by 1978. This work was a stipulation included in the patent. No work has been completed except for the installation of three vault toilets.

DISPOSE OF ISOLATED TRACTS BY PUBLIC SALE/ EXCHANGE WHERE AGRICULTURAL TRESPASS IS OCCURRING, AFTER THE TRESPASSES HAVE BEEN SETTLED.

A number of isolated tracts with agricultural trespasses will be disposed of either by exchange or public sale. Tracts disposed of by public sale must be in the best national interest as required under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act.

ENTER INTO A MAJOR LAND EXCHANGE PROGRAM WITH THE STATE OF IDAHO.

The State of Idaho has made a formal request to acquire the public lands located west of Thatcher known as the Cottonwood Block.

EXCHANGE ISOLATED TRACTS OF PUBLIC LAND WITH LOW PUBLIC VALUES FOR TRACTS OF PRIVATE WITH GREATER PUBLIC VALUES.

Opportunities arise periodically when exchanges can be made with private individuals or companies that will greatly increase public values.



# Range Management

The range program manages the forage on public lands for livestock. Specific activities include authorizing and supervising grazing use, developing livestock facilities, and protecting the range from weed infestations, pests and diseases.

The Soda Springs BLM staff administers 251 grazing leases, varying in size from 15 acres to almost 9,000 acres. These leases authorize grazing for about 23,500 AUMs (animal unit months — see Glossary) of forage. Cattle use about 63 percent of the available AUMs, and sheep use the remaining 37 percent.

Public lands within the units contribute roughly 1.7 percent of the total forage consumed by livestock.

The forage on public land is desirable mainly because of location, not quantity. Public lands are usually interspersed among private lands and are directly connected to the grazing systems used on the private land. Effective range management is difficult because of this scattered land pattern.

All of the unit is grazed during the spring, summer and fall. At lower elevations, vegetation starts growing in mid-May. At higher elevations, growth starts about the first of June.

*Rangeland near the Soda Hills.*





Most public lands are in fair to good range condition. Only 4 percent of the land is in poor condition and only 2 percent is in a downward trend.

Major range management decisions include the following:

#### IMPLEMENT GRAZING SYSTEMS, IN COOPERATION WITH THE LESSEE, ON 106 LEASE AREAS.

Presently, it is not possible to implement allotment management plans on any leases until an environmental impact statement (EIS) is completed. The planning will be revised and the EIS written in 1987.

#### CONTINUE CUSTODIAL MANAGEMENT ON 50 GRAZING LEASE AREAS THAT ARE IN GOOD OR EXCELLENT CONDITION WITH AN IMPROVING TREND.

Past management has proven satisfactory on these leases as reflected in condition class and apparent trend.

#### MAINTAIN THE PRESENT PROGRAM FOR THE CONTROL OF NOXIOUS WEEDS SUCH AS DYER'S WOAD AND MUSK THISTLE.

Cooperative agreements exist with Bear Lake, Caribou and Franklin counties for weed control work on public lands. In addition to work done by these counties, BLM personnel do spot control work where noxious weeds are found.

## Watershed

The watershed program is concerned with relationships between soil, vegetation, and the quality, quantity and timing of water production from watersheds. Runoff from watersheds affects both on-site and downstream use of water. Management involves prescribing some kind of land use, or the modification of vegetative cover.

The Columbia River—Great Basin Divide runs through the area just north of Soda Springs. Watersheds north of this divide eventually drain into the Columbia River, while watersheds to the south drain into the Bear River and the Great Salt Lake.

Watershed condition in 92 percent of the area is moderate or better. The remaining 8 percent, located primarily east of Bear Lake, falls into a critical watershed condition class. Condition over most of this area is stable.

A study conducted by the U.S. Soil Conservation Service in southeastern Idaho reported that almost 80 percent of the sediment from surface runoff comes from farmlands in excess of 12 percent slope.

Decisions related to watershed include the following:

#### IMPLEMENT GRAZING SYSTEMS WHICH WILL MEET THE PHYSIOLOGICAL NEEDS OF THE PLANTS.

Properly implemented grazing systems will increase vegetative cover on the land and thereby improve watershed conditions.

#### DEVELOP PLANS TO IMPROVE WATERSHED CONDITIONS ON PUBLIC LANDS AREAS ALONG THE LOWER



## BLACKFOOT RIVER, WOLVERINE CANYON, COTTONWOOD CREEK, FISH HAVEN CREEK AND THE ONEIDA NARROWS.

Watershed problems exist along these streams. Conflicting watershed uses will be analyzed and a plan formulated.



*Hills east of Bear Lake are in a critical watershed condition class.*

## Recreation

The Caribou National Forest provides the greatest number of recreation opportunities in the area. The most important recreation site on BLM-administered lands is the Blackfoot Reservoir access point at Dike Lake. It has been partially developed in cooperation with the Idaho Department of Fish and Game and the Caribou County Waterways Committee. Day-use facilities have also been established along the lower Blackfoot River, Wolverine Canyon, Fish Haven Creek, and along the Bear River in the Oneida Narrows.

Major recreation decisions include the following:

### DEVELOP THE DIKE LAKE RECREATION SITE.

This 70-acre tract is the only public access point on the entire Blackfoot Reservoir. The area is in need of expanded recreation facilities.

### DEVELOP AN ADEQUATE SIGN PROGRAM FOR THE AREA BY 1981 TO IDENTIFY DIRECTIONS AND DISTANCES TO IMPORTANT AREAS AND FEATURES.

### DEVELOP AN OFF-ROAD VEHICLE USE PLAN.

A unit-wide ORV plan is necessary to protect certain resource values.



## Forest Products

The units contain over 11,000 acres of productive forest land administered by the BLM. These acres are stocked primarily with Douglas-fir; about 3,000 acres are stocked with aspen. Minor commercial tree species include lodgepole pine, subalpine fir and Englemann spruce. An additional 13,000 acres have been classified as non-productive forest land and are stocked primarily with aspen, Rocky Mountain juniper, and mountain maple.

Nearly all of the forest land is located in scattered parcels adjacent to the Caribou National Forest, or adjacent to other blocks of single ownership land such as State land. These forested tracts are generally on the lower slopes in the transition zone between sagebrush and wetter forest lands. Many of the areas are steep, making accessibility difficult.

The timber industry has not been dependent upon BLM timber in this area in the past.

Major forestry decisions include the following:

PROVIDE FOR HARVESTING TIMBER IN THE CHESTERFIELD AND BLACKFOOT MOUNTAIN AREAS. ALL OTHER AREAS WILL BE LOGGED ONLY UNDER SALVAGE CONDITIONS (FIRE AND/OR INSECT INFESTATIONS).

This will allow timber harvesting in the better production areas except the Cottonwood Block. This area is included in a proposed State of Idaho land exchange.



*A camper fishing on the Blackfoot Reservoir at Dike Point. This site, which is the only public access point on the Reservoir, needs expanded recreation facilities.*



INITIATE A CONTROLLED BURNING PROGRAM ON FOREST LAND IN THE BLACKFOOT MOUNTAIN AREA.

Fire is recognized as a good management tool.



*Typical timber stand, a resource which is scattered throughout the units.*

## Access and Transportation

Public lands within the resource area are extremely scattered and isolated. The roughly 200,000 acres in the area are composed of about 440 individual, separate tracts. Many of these tracts are completely surrounded by private lands and have no legal access.

Major access and transportation decisions include the following:

INVENTORY ALL ROADS AND TRAILS FOR HAZARDS AND MAINTENANCE REQUIREMENTS. EVALUATE THE NEED FOR THE ROAD ITSELF, SIGN AND/OR CLOSE ALL ROADS AND TRAILS DEEMED UNNECESSARY; MAINTAIN (TO BLM STANDARDS) ALL ROADS IDENTIFIED IN THE TRANSPORTATION PLAN.

A detailed inventory is needed to determine which roads/trails on the public lands are of value.

OBTAIN LEGAL ACCESS TO PUBLIC LANDS IN THE MORGAN BRIDGE, STUMP CREEK, SLUG CREEK, TAYLOR MOUNTAIN, BLACKFOOT MOUNTAINS, BEAR RIVER, AND SODA HILLS AREAS.

Legal access to these areas is needed for support of the resource programs.

# Environmental Overview

## Minerals

Most of the unit is open to mineral activities under the General Mining Laws. Minerals decisions will encourage mineral exploration and development, while protecting wildlife habitat and the environment to the best of our ability.

Impacts resulting from mineral resource decisions have beneficial and adverse effects on social values and the environment. Minerals with the greatest development potential are phosphate and the possibility of petroleum products discovery. Mineral development tends to commit the total, immediate surrounding land and associated resources.

## Wildlife

Management decisions are aimed at benefiting wildlife habitat and associated species by maintaining a balanced environment. Major conflicts to the wildlife program are impacts on big game winter ranges and/or migration routes from minerals activities. Restrictions on other land use activities will mitigate wildlife impacts.

## Lands

Major land use decisions will provide public land for controlled development and growth under certain conditions. Isolated tracts of certain public land intermingled with private lands can be disposed of by sale or exchange. Many tracts have agricultural trespasses and need attention. Environmental impacts resulting from lands decisions are generally beneficial. Socio-economic factors are most often affected by lands decisions.

## Range Management

Livestock forage decisions are designed to maintain or improve vegetation. Improved range condition and forage production will benefit all activities dependent on a sustained yield of quality rangeland vegetation.

Maintaining a vigorous and healthy vegetative cover is a sound base for multiple-use management of this resource.

## Watershed

Environmentally acceptable management practices, mainly the implementation of grazing systems, will improve watershed condition by correcting imbalances resulting from past uses. Benefits expected are decreased soil erosion, improved vegetative cover and better water quality.

## Recreation

Minimal impacts are expected from recreation management decisions. Decisions generally favor environmental protection and present management, except for the proposed Dike Lake development. The control of surface-disturbing activities and the location of intrusions will preserve historic values and maintain a quality visual resource.



## Forest Products

Surface disturbance from stand improvement and development would have minor impact on visual resources, wildlife and watershed. Local economies would benefit from timber sales. Environmental benefits from well-managed forest lands will include a more healthy resource, capable of providing for other uses.

## Access and Transportation

Access is very important because of the area's scattered land pattern. Management decisions will help provide access to certain, important public land tracts. A roads and trails inventory will evaluate transportation needs, identify hazards and maintain requirements.



*Diamond Creek Valley, southeast of Wayan and Grays Lake. The holes in the photo's top center are exploration pits for federal minerals.*

# Coordination

Public review was an important part in the preparation and approval of this management framework plan. Throughout the planning process, numerous Federal, State and local agencies, as well as members of the general public offered suggestions to improve the plan. The Soda Springs staff contacted representatives of these groups to ensure that planning efforts and management decisions did not conflict with the land use plans of other agencies. The staff considered all comments submitted and used as many of them as possible.

The Bear Lake—Caribou plan was coordinated with several specific planning efforts. County officials were consulted as the plan was developed and informed of the results. Land decisions are in accord with the land use and zoning requirements of the various counties in which the lands are located. The plan was also coordinated with the Caribou National Forest.

# Management Actions

This plan will be followed by on-the-ground actions. Some decisions in the plan may require more detailed planning before implementing. Some decisions have already been or are being implemented.

Development projects are subject to the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act. An environmental assessment will be prepared for each action, whether initiated by industry or the BLM, unless adequately covered in an existing assessment. If the impacts are unacceptable, the proposed action may be modified or rejected.

The MFP decisions will be used to program and budget for the annual work plan. Because on-the-ground actions depend on funding by Congress, it may be some time until some decisions are implemented.

In response to changing resource conditions and management requirements, the plan will be updated and management decisions will be revised as new information becomes available. The public will have opportunities to participate in the planning process when major revisions are made.



# Glossary

**Allotment Management Plan** — A detailed plan for intensively managing and improving a specific grazing allotment.

**Animal Unit Month** — The amount of forage needed to sustain one cow for one month.

**Carrying Capacity** — The maximum stocking rate possible without damaging the vegetation or related resources.

**Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)** — A document that analyzes the environmental impacts of a proposed action and several alternatives.

**Gravity Anomaly** — A difference in gravitational pull which can be an indicator of geothermal resources.

**Overthrust Belt** — An area within the central Rockies with high oil and gas potential. When beds of rock in this area folded into overthrust faults, oil and gas traps were formed.

**Planning Unit** — A portion of a resource area for which inventories and land use plans are developed. In this document, the Caribou and Bear Lake planning units were studied simultaneously.

**Public Lands** — Lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management for multiple uses.

**Stipulations** — The terms or conditions of a permit, lease, right-of-way, application, etc.

**Subsurface Mineral Rights** — When the Federal government retains mineral rights on land for which the surface has been patented to someone else, usually a private individual.

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